



July 1, 2019

Helen Wade, President  
Columbia Public Schools Board of Education  
1818 West Worley Street  
Columbia, Missouri 65203

Dear President Wade:

School safety is a national crisis that requires the collective commitment of our schools, parents and students, and our community. Columbia's students should feel safe whether they are at in their neighborhood, their favorite park, or their school. Unfortunately, our police officers cannot be in all three places at once. While we share the same goals of student safety, it is the bottom-line responsibility of the school board to ensure campus safety and security.

Interim Chief Geoff Jones and Interim City Manager John Glascock have had multiple conversations with Superintendent Peter Stiepleman regarding his request for additional School Resource Officers. During our budget work session, the City Council voted to ask the school board to request additional conversation on this issue.

Currently, the school district reimburses the city for 50% of the officer's salary under a contract that expires this summer. The city calculates the cost of a School Resource Officer based on the actual officer in the position, as more veteran officers earn more than new hires. The cost of a new officer is approximately \$75,000 per annum for salary & benefits. The school district's 50% reimbursement does not include the new officer uniform, equipment cost, police vehicle, fuel and maintenance. It also does not reflect the true percentage of the School Resource Officer's time dedicated to school district-related duties, which Chief Jones estimates to be closer to 80-85% of the SRO's time.

When it comes to city services like water & light utilities, park and recreation services, fire protection, or public safety services, the City of Columbia has to recover the full cost of delivering excellent service. The City of Columbia also has to be consistent with its policies and procedures.

For example, the Daniel Boone Regional Library District—another political subdivision with taxing authority—is responsible for 100% of its public safety needs by hiring off-duty Columbia Police Department officers. Moreover, the Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Comer decision by the U.S. Supreme Court would likely prohibit the government from denying religious schools an otherwise available public benefit on account of its religious status. Extending law enforcement services to every public and private school under the current scheme, upon request, without recovering the city's full cost is simply unsustainable and diverts law enforcement resources from other critical needs in our community.

The City Council views school resource officers as an integral part of our community policing philosophy and plan. We believe POST-certified peace officers provide the best service to the community, and better service to our schools than a private security force. We want students at all grade levels to form constructive relationships with police officers.

Beyond the issue of the school district's fair share of funding that more accurately reflects the cost, time, and dedication to the school district, the City Council believes school resource officers can be more fully integrated into the District's safety plan and policies, including:

1. Officers working in schools are sometimes used to separate youth from the school because of violence or other offenses. However, officers should also participate in the restorative practice meetings between parents, school staff, and the student to bring youth back into the school environment as part of the solution.
2. The Columbia Career Center is developing a public safety curriculum that will serve all high school students. Allowing School Resource Officers to teach part of the curriculum will allow for more positive interactions, encourage good citizenship, and provide an opportunity to recruit young people into public safety career fields. It will also help the City of Columbia to attract and cultivate a police department that reflects the community it serves.
3. Likewise, the public safety explorer program provides the opportunity for students to interact with police officers and firefighters in a positive learning environment. Recognizing the explorer program as a CPS-sanctioned extracurricular activity including the use of school district facilities would be an outward sign of support from CPS administration that strengthens our sense of community.

The overall security of Columbia's public schools remains the responsibility of the Columbia Public Schools and its elected school board. School Resource Officers are not administrators or district employees. However, they do interact with administrators, act as a resource for all people in the schools, and help to solve problems...just as they would in the community.

We hope that this correspondence allows the school board and city council to open a dialogue about school resource officers and the best way to balance student and community safety.

Sincerely,



Brian Treece  
Mayor



Clyde Ruffin  
Ward 1 Council Member



Ian Thomas  
Ward 4 Council Member



Michael Trapp  
Ward 2 Council Member



Matt Pitzer  
Ward 5 Council Member



Karl Skala  
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Betsy Peters  
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